

CHAPTER 13

Parks & Recreation

Introduction

The City's parks, recreation facilities, and public open spaces are among its most important and valued assets. City parks, playgrounds, trails, and recreation centers and facilities contribute to the City's quality of life in many ways. In addition to offering places to play, meet, relax, and exercise, they enhance neighborhood livability, improve the image and attractiveness of commercial areas, give context to historic and cultural sites, bolster property values, and provide access to the natural environment. Commitment to a long-term program of recreational facility and park improvement, maintenance, and expansion is key to preserving the City's investments and ensuring the recreational needs of all citizens, including seniors, youth, indoor and outdoor athletic users, and others are met.

This element of the Comprehensive Plan builds on the City's *Recreation Facilities Study and Parks and Recreation Master Plan*, adopted by the City Council in 1997. Recommendations in the Recreation Facilities Study and Parks and Recreation Master Plan call for improvements to existing parks and recreation centers, the development of new facilities in underserved areas, the preservation of historic facilities and landscapes, and the expansion of local and regional bikeways and greenways. The recommendations of the Recreation Facilities Study and Parks and Recreation Master Plan, along with new opportunities identified through the planning process, are addressed below.

Context & Recommendations

Park & Facility Improvement

The *Recreation Facilities Study and Parks and Recreation Master Plan* includes an inventory of public recreation facilities and parks with an evaluation of their condition and quality. In addition, planners used a variety of methods to assess demand for facilities and activities. Research on the demand for recreation facilities and activities included a telephone survey, an analysis of current participation in recreation activities, and a review of recreation demand standards published by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation in the Virginia Outdoors Plan. Based on this research, the *Recreation Facilities Study and Parks and Recreation Master Plan* recommends standards for the number and types of recreation facilities needed in

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Lynchburg. Taken together, the inventory and demand assessment resulted in recommendations for improvements to facilities throughout the City as well as the development of new facilities in underserved areas. A summary of key findings and recommendations follows.

- Many of the City's community centers as well as the Department's headquarters at 301 Grove Street are in need of renovation to make them more usable and to ensure that they meet current fire and building codes, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.
- The City's 770 acres of parkland generally are in good condition, though many require improvement to meet ADA standards.
- Playgrounds and play equipment must be rehabilitated for improved safety according to modern standards.
- Several parks, including Miller and Riverside Parks, contain historic City Beautiful landscapes that need to be studied, catalogued, preserved, and interpreted. The City Beautiful movement of the late 1800s featured classically designed parks, many modeled after those developed by Daniel Burnham and Frederick Law Olmsted for the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Examples include New York City's Central Park and the parks in Boston's Emerald Necklace.
- The inventory of parks in the *Recreation Facilities Study and Parks and Recreation Master Plan* shows that recreation facilities and park lands are not evenly distributed across the City. The Cheese Creek and Tomahawk Creek-Timberlake areas are underserved, so the Plan recommends establishing new community parks in those areas and in the Tyreeanna/Pleasant Valley area. In addition, since the publication of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the City has been able to acquire land in the Lynchpin Industrial Center for a nature park and an environmental education center.
- Large recreation facilities in the list include a new athletic field complex and an indoor recreation center with gym and, in the future, an indoor pool. Citizens expressed a desire for neighborhood-based recreation, but also supported the construction of a new central indoor recreation center with a gym and pool.

Shared Use of Facilities

City residents depend a great deal on ballfields, outdoor courts, and gymnasiums in the school system to provide opportunities for general recreation. Many of those facilities show wear due to heavy use and are in need of renovation and improvement. The City needs to improve existing school recreation facilities and establish an agreement between the City Council, the School Board, and local neighborhoods regarding shared use, or community use, of school facilities.

Park Master Plans

The *Recreation Facilities Study and Parks and Recreation Master Plan* contains detailed recommendations for improvements to Perrymont, Jefferson, and Peaks View parks. Master plans are needed for Miller, Riverside, College, and Younger parks, as well as for The Merritt Hutchinson Stadium area, prior to the implementation of any improvements.

Support for an indoor recreation center, additional neighborhood parks, and facilities for teens was also expressed. The Department of Parks and Recreation is currently working with America's Promise to better serve children and teens at the City's recreation centers.

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Citizens attending public forums in 2000 and 2001 placed particular emphasis on protecting existing open space and expanding the City's greenway system. The City should complete a Greenway Master Plan that expands the James River Heritage Trail and the Blackwater Creek Natural Area and establishes similar areas along other City streams. Preserving and protecting sensitive natural environments along the City's streams can be achieved through a variety of mechanisms. It is recommended the City establish a program to purchase and accept donations of open space in fee simple and by easement. To maximize planning efforts and develop a comprehensive greenway system, the City should coordinate its greenway planning efforts with on-going regional efforts.

Bikeways

Citizens also favored expanding the City's bikeway system. The City should prepare a City Bikeway Plan that builds on the Regional Bikeway Plan developed in May 2000 by the Region 2000 Regional Commission. The May 2000 plan included off-road bicycle trails along greenways as well as on-road facilities, throughout the region.

The City should be proactive in developing its system of walking and biking trails. New trails and improvements should be included in the capital improvement plan and the development review process. Bikeway planning efforts should also be included in the Metropolitan Planning Organization's Transportation Improvement Plan and in the Virginia Transportation Development Plan, as further described in Chapter 14, Transportation.

Water Recreation

Citizens attending the public forums also favored water recreation and improved access to the James River. Connected to this interest in the James River was support for the recreational and community event spaces of the *Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan 2000*.

Funding

Many sources of funding, both public and private, must be explored in order to pay for all the recommended park and recreation improvements. The City needs to evaluate fee structures on an annual basis to ensure delivery of quality recreational programs and to seek funds from all available state and federal resources to support facility and program improvements. The City should also pursue donations and sponsorships from private individuals, businesses, industries, and others.

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Goals, Objectives & Strategies

Goal 1. Provide a range of individual and family oriented outdoor recreation opportunities, while preserving the natural, cultural, and historic qualities of park lands and maintaining high quality facilities.

Objective 1.A. Standards. Identify and strive to meet appropriate recreation standards for programs and facilities.

- 1) Reconfirm appropriateness of standards used in the *Recreation Facilities Study and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan* and formalize their application in facility planning and capital budgeting processes.
- 2) When standards cannot be met through the use or improvement of existing park and school sites, prepare plans for the development of new parks and facilities.

Objective 1.B. Park & Facility Upgrade. Upgrade existing facilities in parks to meet current codes and to improve their appearance and function.

- 1) Prepare master plans for Miller Park, Riverside Park, The Merritt Hutchinson Stadium area, and other City parks to guide and appropriately locate needed upgrades and improvements.
- 2) Conserve and renew the natural qualities of parks and open space by the addition of new shade and ornamental trees and landscape plantings to replace those areas in decline.
- 3) Prepare plans, including cost estimates and schedules, to bring all park facilities into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- 4) Prepare a plan to bring all playgrounds and play equipment into compliance with published national standards for recreation equipment, while offering a diversity of physical experiences for all ages. Seek community and private sector support for improvements.
- 5) Schedule periodic renovations of athletic fields, lawns, park drives and parking areas, sidewalks, trails, and other areas.
- 6) Continue to implement a program to upgrade tennis and basketball courts, addressing needs for reconstruction, resurfacing, fencing, and lighting where appropriate. Plans for the relocation or expansion of facilities should be considered during master planning processes.
- 7) Renovate The Merritt Hutchinson Stadium, at a minimum to comply with the ADA and standards of the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues.

Objective 1.C. Historic Park Landscapes & Structures. Incorporate historic preservation, cultural landscape preservation, and cultural resource interpretation in plans for historic parks.

- 1) Catalogue, evaluate, and, where necessary, stabilize all historic park structures and landscape features.
- 2) Develop interpretive programs to explain their significance in Lynchburg's history.

Objective 1.D. New Park and Recreation Facilities. Increase recreation opportunities to meet the needs of citizens.

- 1) Acquire land for, master plan, and develop a new athletic field complex to include lighted ballfields, soccer fields, and associated support facilities.
- 2) Master plan and develop a new park as an environmental education center on donated land in the Lynchpin Industrial Center.
- 3) Master plan and develop the Schenkel and Allen-Morrison properties, in conjunction with The Merritt Hutchinson Stadium area, for recreational purposes.
- 4) Develop the Riverfront Festival Park as master planned in the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan 2000.

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- 5) Acquire land for, master plan, and develop a skateboard park.
- 6) Establish new community parks in the Cheese Creek, Tomahawk Creek/Timberlake, and Tyreeanna/Pleasant Valley areas of the City. Identify potential sites, prepare feasibility studies, acquire land, and work with surrounding communities to prepare master plans for each park.

Objective 1.E. Greenway Program. Create a system of open space along the James River and other City streams that connects parks, natural areas, schools, and other important natural and recreational resources.

- 1) Develop a greenway master plan that expands the James River Heritage Trail and the Blackwater Creek Natural Area and establishes similar areas along other City streams.
- 2) Coordinate the City's greenway plan with regional greenway planning efforts.
- 3) Seek the preservation of open space along City streams through the application of natural resource protection standards to private and public development projects.
- 4) Organize a program to purchase and accept donations of open space land in fee simple and by easement for natural resource protection and passive recreational use along streams.
- 5) Establish standards for the development of passive recreational use facilities so that they do not impair the natural functions of greenways
- 6) Develop a system of bicycle and walking trails within the greenway system that can become a part of the National Heritage Trail. First priority trails include:
 - Ivy Creek from Blackwater Creek Natural Area to Lynchpin Industrial Center.
 - Blackwater Creek and Burton Creek from Blackwater Creek Natural Area to Sandusky Park to Heritage High School, with a side connection to Perrymont Park and School.
 - The Ed Page Entrance on Linkhorne Road, Lynchburg College.

Objective 1.F. Water Recreation. Encourage appropriate water recreational use through the establishment of James River and Blackwater Creek "blueways."

- 1) Prepare a master plan for water recreational use and environmental and heritage interpretation of the James River, its islands, and the navigable portions of Blackwater Creek.
- 2) Develop water access and use areas based on the master plan.
- 3) Install interpretive signage and develop and offer programs to interpret the environmental and historic features of the river and creek, as at Percival's Island.
- 4) Participate in local, regional, and state water quality improvement programs for the James River and regional streams.

Objective 1.G. Bikeways & Cyclist-accessible Roadways. Expand the City's bikeway system.

- 1) Prepare a City bikeway plan that builds on the Regional Bikeway Plan and is included in the Metropolitan Planning Organization's Transportation Improvement Plan and in the Virginia Transportation Development Plan.
- 2) Construct new bike lanes and off-road bike paths annually as a regular part of the capital improvements program.
- 3) Seek the dedication of bike lanes and bike paths through the development review process.
- 4) Connect the City's bikeway system to:
 - The James River Heritage Trail connecting west to the Blue Ridge Parkway and east to Richmond along the James River.
 - A proposed Lynchburg to Appomattox Trail connecting east to Appomattox Court House.
 - A proposed Bedford bikeway system through Bedford County to Poplar Forest, the City of Bedford, and the D-Day Memorial.

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Objective 1.H. Park and Outdoor Recreation Facility Maintenance. Ensure long-term maintenance of all park lands and outdoor recreation facilities.

- 1) Develop maintenance standards for park lands and outdoor recreation facilities with identified budgets.
- 2) Ensure that the cost of maintenance is considered and committed to in the preparation of master plans and capital improvements plans.

Goal 2. Provide safe, accessible, and attractive indoor recreation facilities that encourage recreational use and that can be effectively managed, maintained, and staffed.

Objective 2.A. Community Centers. Ensure that all parks and recreation community centers are attractive, function well, and meet current codes.

- 1) Develop community centers as “Centers of Promise” working cooperatively with the Department of Human Services, America’s Promise, and neighborhood and community groups.
- 2) Develop a program to bring all buildings into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and current fire and building codes, correct mechanical or other system deficiencies, and address functional constraints to full programmed use. The program should include the improvement of mechanical systems, interior and exterior finishes, lighting, and furnishings.

Objective 2.B. Indoor & Special Facilities. Rehabilitate and improve other City indoor recreation and special facilities.

- 1) Rehabilitate the current Parks and Recreation Department headquarters building at 301 Grove Street to meet current codes and to serve as a central facility for classes in the arts and other interests.
- 2) Work in cooperation with the Lynchburg Main Street Program to develop updated architectural designs for expansion of the Community Market that will bolster and create revenue-generating opportunities and complement the historic significance of the Market complex, as recommended in the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan 2000.
- 3) Upgrade the Market building to meet current codes, to improve its exterior and interior appearance, to expand permanent interior retail space, to meet internal vendor needs, to upgrade the food court area, and to meet other needs as recommended by the architectural study.
- 4) Renovate and improve the City Armory to meet current codes and to include the installation of air conditioning, replacement of the gym floor and windows, and other identified needs.

Objective 2.C. Underserved Segments. Meet the specific needs of underserved segments of the population, including seniors, youth, indoor athletics users, and others.

- 1) Consider the construction of a new indoor recreation center of about 45,000 square feet. Include a gymnasium, classrooms, multi-purpose rooms, administrative offices for the Parks and Recreation Department, and support space. Consider the addition of an indoor pool to the new recreation center in a future development phase.
- 2) Develop indoor recreation/museum facilities included in the *Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan 2000*.

Objective 2.D. Park and Building Maintenance. Ensure long-term maintenance of all buildings and facilities.

- 1) Develop maintenance standards for all parks, buildings, and facilities with identified budgets.
- 2) Ensure that the cost of maintenance is considered and committed to in the preparation of master plans, renovation plans, and capital improvement plans.

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Goal 3. Encourage and coordinate community recreational use of school sites to achieve maximum, sustainable use of fields and facilities, while recognizing that enrolled students are the primary users.

Objective 3.A. School Facilities. Explore opportunities for the joint use of school facilities.

- 1) Set the stage for school facilities to become true community facilities rather than just facilities for school children.
- 2) Consider the needs of many City agencies, including Parks and Recreation and Human Services, as well as potential nonprofit users.
- 3) Address such issues as use priority, supervising authority, maintenance schedules and costs, fees, deposits, insurance coverage, and liability.

Objective 3.B. School Recreation Facilities. Improve existing school recreation facilities.

- 1) Institute a program of field renovation and improvement at all middle school and selected elementary school athletic fields, improving turf and providing adequate fencing, backstops, and other safety features.
- 2) Continue a program of improvements to fields at Sandusky Elementary and Middle Schools, Sheffield Elementary School, Paul Monroe Elementary School, Linkhorne Elementary and Middle Schools, Bedford Hills Elementary School, and Dunbar Middle School.
- 3) Complete upgrades of tennis courts.
- 4) Explore cooperative investment in the rehabilitation of school playgrounds and play equipment.

Objective 3.C. Cooperative Efforts. Improve levels of collaboration and planning for any new major facility development in joint park-school sites.

Goal 4. Explore new, different sources of funding to support the parks and recreation program.

Objective 4.A. Fee Structures. Continue to evaluate fee structures on an annual basis to ensure the delivery of quality recreational programs at market values. Explore the development of new or expanded programs financed through special revenue funds.

Objective 4.B. Alternative Funding Methods. Explore alternative funding methods for parks and recreation improvement projects.

Objective 4.C. Government Funding Resources. Seek funding from all appropriate federal and state sources including the Land & Water Conservation Fund, TEA-21, the Virginia Outdoors Fund, the Virginia Land Conservation Fund, the Virginia Recreational Trails Fund, VDOT recreational road access funds, Virginia Game and Inland Fisheries, the Virginia Department of Forestry, and any others.

Objective 4.D. Private Sector Funding & Assistance. Tap into private sector assistance for parks and recreation programs and facilities.

- 1) Explore setting up a trust fund or nonprofit foundation to raise private funds for parks and recreation.
- 2) Seek donations from private individuals, businesses, industries, and leagues through the trust fund or foundation.
- 3) Use volunteers to assist staff in the delivery of recreational programs, in staffing special events, and in contributing to trail maintenance through the "Adopt a Trail" program.



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